1: Raswan T-3 (1913-35) 1947 MD4 Rwala MD4

XVII

The War Goddess

TRA'D IBN SATTAM hurried with me to the sacred Standard, which rose high above the travelling-litters. We made our way through an agitated throng. The buzz of women's and children's voices intermingled with the grunting and complaining of laden camels. On nearer approach I noticed a group of women afoot, threading their way to the Standard; they waved their head-cloths and kept up a high-pitched chant. They were escorting a young woman, walking sedately in their midst. It was Tuëma. Her beautiful serene face was radiant and aglow with health. Her eyes under their long lashes were grave and devout, but she had a bright glance for Tra'd ibn Sattam, who had chosen her out of all the Ruala maidens for the signal honour of riding in the *Markab*, and on recognizing me her cheeks dimpled with a smile.

When Tuëma and her train of women had come up with the camel which bore the tribal symbol, a tall powerful animal led by a slave, she ran by its side for a space. The trilling and waving of the women rose to a joyous frenzy. Suddenly Tuëma broke away from her retinue, and with a running start grasped the camel's shoulder-girth and climbed nimbly on to its back and into the Palladium. In the left fore-corner of the sacred structure was a seat with a footrest, and on this she composed herself, enthroned on high like a desert queen above her

l: Raswan T-3 (1913-35) 1947 MD4 Rwala MD4

people. Thereupon, she untied her head-cloth and her glorious tresses fell over her shoulders. At a sign from her, the escorting women, who had continued to walk beside the camels, climbed up again to their several litters.

From the midst of the migrating multitude now came the sounds of shots fired in jubilation, and soon tribesmen were galloping forward from all directions. They assembled and in a body raced toward the *Markab*, Faris at their head. Amidst the thunder of hoofs and the glint of carbines, there arose the wild chant of the young men as they pressed around their queen.

Tuēma had risen and stood erect in the lofty frame. Her face became transfigured in an ecstasy of joy. Suddenly she put both her hands to her throat and tore open her dress and broke into jubilant song. With bared breast she rose, straining her supple body until she was poised high above the ark, holding aloft a bunch of snow-white ostrich plumes. She looked like a goddess—the bravest and most beautiful maiden of her great tribe. She cried to the youths words of passionate eloquence. She inflamed them with warlike ardour. She exhorted them to remember the heroes who once had chained themselves to this Standard by means of the iron shackles of their mares, so that they might not leave their queen, but defend her to the last breath.

Faris's eyes were fixed in rapture on Tuēma, on her lofty throne. In his hand flashed the sword of Jidua, a great hero of the Ruala. He carried the historic blade to his lips with both hands and kissed it. "O Tuēma,

1: Raswan T-3 (1913-35) 1947 MD4 Rwala MD4

guardian of my soul!" he cried. Then he wheeled his horse and raced off with his riders.

Tra'd ibn Sattam took the leading rope of Tuëma's camel from the slave and led her past the marching tribe. For all the dire distress, a festive spirit animated the whole people. It was a festal day, for the Ruala had a queen again—a virgin in the sacred Ark; and under her symbolic leadership they pressed forward to their destiny.

Evening came and the whole tribe made camp. But in the grey of the next dawn they were on the march again.

Armed motor-cars circled about the widespread herds and guarded the flanks of the great migration. Despite the fact that we marched in close formation, it was inevitable under the conditions that single families or even groups of them, with their camels, should lag behind or struggle in detachments; these would be an easy prey for the enemy, of whose presence we were fully aware from the surprise attacks made each day by strong mounted bands and the appearance of numerous hostile fighting-motors.